

Part 4

Read the article and answer the questions. Write a maximum of five words for each answer. An example is done for you.

Happy is Good

"If you ask people what they want for their children, most say, 'I want them to be happy' ", says psychologist and happiness researcher Sonja Lyubomirsky of the University of California, Riverside. Not that long ago, however, joy wasn't considered serious enough for psychologists to study. "When I started doing research 18 years ago", Lyubomirsky says, "happiness was not considered a scientific topic."

Today, happiness is a hot subject of research. As part of a growing field called positive psychology, more and more researchers are looking for ways to help people become happier, even if they don't feel depressed to begin with. And there are plenty of reasons why happiness is a worthy subject of study. Among other benefits, happy people are healthier, have more friends, and make more money than their sadder peers.

However, the field of positive psychology has had to overcome a significant obstacle. The problem is, it's difficult to scientifically measure happiness. It's also hard to compare one person's sense of well-being with another's. On a scale of 1 to 10, how can we be sure that my "8" is happier than your "6"? "No one can tell you how happy you are", Lyubomirsky says.

In recent years, however, researchers have developed what they consider to be accurate measurements of happiness. One technique involves looking at how often people genuinely smile in their daily lives. It's easy to tell real smiles from the fake; genuine smiles engage the corners of the eyes and involve muscles around the mouth that fake smilers can't control. In their studies, scientists also get people to describe everything they did over a course of a day and how they felt about each activity, rather than talking about general feelings. Scientists also look at images of the brain for clues: an area called the left frontal cortex tends to work harder in people who are happier and "lights up" in brain scans.

Scientists now think people are born with a general tendency toward a certain level of happiness, and maintain that mood in their day-to-day lives. About half of a person's "happiness quotient" comes from the personality he or she is born with. Extreme events, such as winning the lottery or being injured in an accident, can cause temporary bursts of happiness or sadness. But eventually, people return to about the same emotional state they're normally at.

So, what about the other half of the "happiness quotient"? About 10 per cent of that quotient depends on external circumstances, such as how much money people make or how healthy they are. The remaining 40 per cent, says Lyubomirsky, is entirely up to you.

Example: What do most people want for their children?
happiness

1. What was not previously considered important enough to study?

2. What is the psychological study of happiness called?

3. What do researchers want to help people do?

4. What can researchers do better now?

5. What is one way happiness can be measured?

6. Where are the muscles that real smiles engage?

7. What part of the brain works harder when someone is happy?

Total: 7 marks
 Total marks for Reading: 26